SOCIO-ADMINISTRATIVE CONDITION OF MITHILĀ UNDER THE GREAT KARṆĀṬAS

Md. Aquique

Before the appearance of the Karṇāṭas on the scene Mithilā had passed through different phases of political domination. It was, however, left to king Nānyadeva, the founder of Simraon dynasty, to restore the glory of Mithilā when he occupied the land in 1097 A.D.[1] Though a foreigner in Mithilā, Nānyadeva identified himself entirely with the people of Mithilā who hailed the new rule which ushered in an era of splendid glory and achievements.

The Karṇāṭa Kings from Nānyadeva to Harisiṁhadeva ruled over Mithilā for more than two centuries and laid the foundations of greatness and glory which Mithilā enjoyed in this part of the country till about the 16th century. It was the age during which Āryāvarta was passing gradually into the hands of the Muslims. The Karṇāṭa Kings with the help of the Maithila scholars, and statesmen managed to keep the Muslims away and maintained their independence for more than a hundred years when the whole of Āryāvarta had succumbed to the Muslim force. Mithilā was the last Hindu Kingdom under the Karṇāṭa dynasty[2] in North India which was subdued and conquered by the Muslim invaders in the early part of fourteenth century. Even when Mithilā was conquered in 1323 A.D., it is remarkable to note that Mithilā did not pass under the direct rule of the Muslims but it was a scholar Brāhmaṇa of Mithilā to whom the state of Mithilā was entrusted to rule over. It was a limited sovereignty no doubt but it was sovereignty nonetheless. It was the result of the social re-construction and consolidation carried out by the scholar statesmen of Mithilā during the Karṇāṭa rule. The rule of the native Brāhmaṇas however saved Mithilā from the direct rule of the Muslims.

I

The Karṇāṭas established their rule over Mithilā at a time when the conflict between Vedic and Buddhist systems had been set at rest by the

1 For details, see Thakur, *History of Mithilā*, Chapter V, Darbhanga, 1956.

2 *Ibid.*

assimilation of Buddhism in neo-Hinduism and territorial division of castes had crystallised. New social values were being recognised and the old order was yielding place to new. Old laws were being adapted to suit the conditions of the time by giving them new interpretations. On the other hand, the Muslims were advancing gradually from the West and South-West and the whole of Āryāvarta was threatened with the onslaught of Muslim religious adventurism before which one state after the other[1] succumbed with the result that soon after the Karṇāṭas settled themselves, the whole of Āryāvarta passed into the hands of religiously fanatic and ruthlessly cruel Muslims.

The leaders of the Maithila society under the enlightened and benevolent Karṇāṭas used every stratagem to keep the Muslims away and set about consolidating their own social structure. A new norm or pattern was planned and promulgated to regulate the en‡ire social behaviour and personal discipline for each caste or group; and though drastic changes were introduced in every sphere of life these changes were brought about by giving new interpretations to the old rules, so that the whole process seemed outwardly as evolutionary. Continuity with the past was thus maintained unimpaired though sometimes only in name. This is what we call *Sanātana Dharma* of which Mithilā has been a champion and of which she is still a strong-hold. An example will be sufficient to explain this evolutionary proccss by means of which revolutionary changes were brought about in the Maithila way of life.

The ancient *Gṛhyasūtras* that regulated the daily domestic life of the *Ārya Dvijas* till about the 10th century recommended four *āśramas* of which the first was *Brahmacharya* during which a *Dvija* boy was required to live with his teacher after the *Upanayana Saṁsakāra*. By the Karṇāṭa time the observance of *Brahmacharya* had fallen into disuse but the initiation was still considered essential for investing him with *Dvija*-hood. They combined, therefore, all the rituals of a *Brahmachārī* from his first taking to the *Guru* (teacher) af er *Upanayana* till his leaving the *Guru's* home. *Samāvartana*, into one single ritual and added to it the first shaving of the boy's head which must precede the *Upanayana*. All the four rites, *Churākaraṇa, Upanayana, Vedārambha* and *Samāvartana* were performed on the same day in course of the same function with the four rituals taking place one after the other. As a result of this the actual period of *Brahmacharya* covered only a couple of hours or so which according to the old *Gṛhyasūtras* should last for at least twelve years. The entire function came to be known as *Upanayana* which, in fact, is

only one of the four rites that are performed along with it. All those rites were regulated by the old *Gṛhyasūtras* which proved very inconvenient during later times and, therefore, hand-books were compiled strictly on the lines of the *Gṛhyas* but avoiding all points of dispute for which the right course decided as the most acceptable was incorporated therein. This was done separately for the followers of the *Yajurveda* and *Sāmaveda* simultaneously during the later Karṇāṭa days sometimes towards the close of the 13th century. The *Paddhatis* or hand-books are followed up to the present day all over Mithilā regulating the performance of these necessary rites or *Saṁsakāras*.

The Maithila way of life as it is lived to-day was thus determined during the Karṇāṭa times, six hundred years ago and it was done in such a planned way that the approved way of life was clearly defined with the unapproved way of life clearly demarcated. Within these limits the individuals were free, and are still free, but overstepping of the limits have always been looked down upon with great disfavour. The doctrine of the *Mahābhārata* '*Dharma* consists in keeing within the limits', applied much more accurately in the case of the people of Mithilā than anywhere else and, therefore, we can say that the old Hindu way of life can be seen still in its pristine purity in the Maithila way of life.

It must be noted in this connection that the more disciplined among the group of people in Mithilā are flourishing and maintained their individuality; those who have not observed the social laws have become dismembered. But the essence of the Maithila way of life consists in the fine equipoise between the social or group loyalty and individual liberty. They stick tenanciously to the old order and in that they appear rigidly conservative and orthodox but in spirit they are very tolerant and liberal and once they decide to make a change they do so with one will, with courage and determination. It is a pity that the Maithila way of life has been changing at a terrific speed as perhaps never before but these changes are sporadic without direction or purpose. Though politically dead, Mithilā is still culturally alive through its own ways of life.

II

Throughout the period of the Karṇāṭa rule, the main trends of administration continued as of old with the Kings acting as the hub of the administration. He had a number of ministers to aid and advise him. There is, however, a reference to an attempt made by the ministers of the Karṇāṭa King, Rāma Siṁha to establish a council of seven elders to

provide a check upon the tyrannical proclivities of the King. But this was a mere temporary effusion.

The marked development of associated or cooperative life is a characteristic feature of ancient Hindu civilization. That spirit is visible in the spheres of religion, learning, politics, civics and economics. The village administration in ancient India so also in Mithilā during the period under review is just one particular line of that development. It is to that elaborate system of village administration that we owe the preservation of the integrity, independence, and individuality of Hindu culture despite the world sharing and catastrophic political movements to which that culture was exposed. Foreign invasions did not affect the trade-unions and other village organisations. It was why Metcalf said that the village communities were little self-contained republics, independent of any foreign relations.

The first indication of the age-old village administration during the period under review, is enumerated in detail in the *Rājanītiratnākara* of Caṇḍeśvara Thākura (renowned 13th-14th century jurist of Mithilā), who was a Minister of State[3] of the last Karṇāṭa King Harisiṁhadeva.

Every village or *grāma* was, during this period, a self-reliant administrative unit headed by the *Grāmapati* or *Grāmādhipati* (village headman) who looked after its over-all administration and catered to the various requirements of the viilagers. The *Rājanītiratnākara* (RR) enumerates the different categories of the village units in the following order of gradations:

(1) *Grāma*;

(ii) *Dasa-Grāma-pati* (Head of ten Villages);

(iii) *Viṁśatiṁsa-grāmapati* (Head of twenty or thirty villages);

(iv) *Sahaśra-grāmapati* (Head of a thousand villages); and finally,

(v) The *Rāṣṭra* consisting of hundreds of villages.[4]

The various categories of village-heads were determined according to the population and size of the villages.[5] If the population of a village was quite sufficient and its size fairly large, it was placed under the charge

3 *Cf. RR*, Ed. Jayaswal, K. P., Patna, 1924, p. 1.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 68; also *cf.* Thakur, U., *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Culture*, New Delhi, p. 203.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 69; also *cf. Ibid.*

of a Headman. If the villages were small, then two or three, sometimes even ten, villages were federated together and placed under the charge of one Headman for the purpose of administrative expediencey. In this way, the various units were constituted and the gradations of the Head determined for its smooth functioning.

Besides the above, there used to be a protective unit including two, three, five or a hundred or a thousand villages according to their size and population, known as *Gulma*, which was placed under the charge of a company of soldiers commanded by a trustee officer for the protection of the villages as well as well as the kingdom. This shows that the villages were well protected and, in times of external aggression, they supplied the necessary force to the kings to fight against the enemies.[6] Whenever there arose a dispute or quarrel among the inhabitants of the village and the village-head was unable to settle the issue, it was his duty to refer it to the higher authority, viz., *Dasa-grāmapati* (Head of ten villages) who promptly took up the matter and decided it. If the latter also failed to find a solution he referred it to the Head of twenty villages, the latter, in turn, to the Head of hundred villages and the latter, in case of failure personally presented the case before the highest authority, viz., the Head of thousand villages.[7]

The payments made to the services of the above officers were also varied. Whatever articles the villagers paid in kind, i.e. crops, etc. to the king, as taxes, were given by the latter to the *Grāmapati* (Head of one village) towards his salary. The Head of ten villages (*Dasa* or *Dasesa)* was given as much land as he could cultivate with two ploughs (i.e., one *Kula* consisting of two ploughs, each with oxen); the Head of twenty villages (*Vimśa* or *Vimśatimsa*) enjoyed as much land as he could till with ten ploughs (five *Kulas*); the Head of hundred villages (*Satesa* or *Grāmasatādhyakṣa*) enjoyed one village (*Grāma*) and the Head of a thousand villages (*Sahasrādhipati*) enjoyed a city or a town (*Puram*).[8]

Besides village-affairs, the village heads had other works to attend to. Their work was supervised by a Minister specially appointed for the purpose by the king from among those who were close to him and

6 Thakur, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-04.
7 *RR.*, p. 69.
8 *Ibid.*, For details see, Thakur, U., *op. cit.*, p. 204.

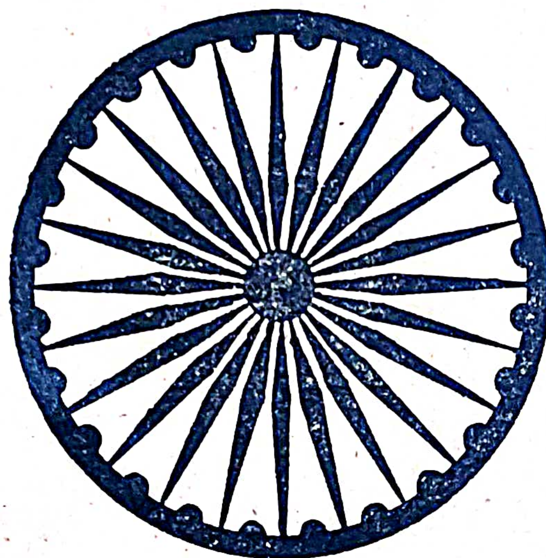
who were loyal and ever alert. It seems that something like a Ministry for Rural Affairs functioned, of which the Minister-in-charge was the chief authority. In every city and town there was a superintendent (*Sarvārthacintaka*) who was elevated in rank, quite formidable, like a planet among the stars, and who struck terror, as it were, into the wrong-doers. It was the duty of this official to visit, by turn, the village officials, checking their attitude the people, lest they became knaves and seized the property of others.[9] Thus, on the basis of the details enumerated in Caṇḍeśvara's work we may now safely conclude that the history of the glorious village administration in India had an unbroken continuity from the earliest times onwards.

9 *RR.* p. 69; Manu, 7. 121-22; Cf. Thakur, U, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

THE JOURNAL
OF
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOL. LXII JANUARY-DECEMBER, 1976 PARTS I-IV

CHIEF EDITOR
Professor Upendra Thakur



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY, PATNA
Price Rs. 50/-